

A virxe roxa by Marcos Nine



A virxe roxa by Marcos Nine tells the story of Aurora Rodriguez Carballeira, who grew up in Ferrol at the turn of the 20th century. As she matured, she became interested in utopian societies, and even attempted to create one. She devoted all her energy to her daughter Hildegart (whose father was a priest who would not claim paternity) whom she saw as the prototype of the 'new woman'. By 14 years old, Hildegart can speak English and French and entered the university in Madrid to study both law and liberal arts. Two years later, Hildegart starts writing books about female sexuality, joins political parties and starts to be independent of her mother. There is conflict, as Aurora feels she is the only one entitled to control her daughter/creation. Eventually, Aurora kills Hildegart when she is only 19 years old.

Working from archival footage is different from shooting live events. Both sources are an artist's version of reality, but with archival images, you have reality filtered through two authors, the original creator and the subsequent selector. Marcos Nine does not have actual footage or photos from the life of Aurora Rodriguez nor could he interview anyone who knew her. He does use film clips of real events, but they were not from Aurora's life. Many were not even shot in Spain. Is **A virxe roxa** a documentary or a truly new film form?

A virxe roxa is one of the most engaging films I have seen in recent years. The reason this is so is how Nine uses images. Experiences are the result of how we process sensual information. In a movie theatre, our experiences are formed by what we see and hear. The process of experience goes

through stages rapidly. The first is contact —*I like it, don't like it, couldn't care less*. Then we recognize the image or sound. Recognition leads to associations, memories, emotions, and finally, consciousness puts it all together into what we call experience. Nine has used images and sound to provide an emotional experience of what it might have felt like to be Aurora Rodriguez.

The movie does not feel fast because the narration is slow-paced. It is amazing how quickly we can recognize an image, less than a second. Nine gives us more than enough time to create an experience. The narration functions like a guided meditation to help the viewer sort through the 20-30 images each minute. I will highlight the two most emotionally intense segments of the film, the conception or creation of Hildegart and her death or destruction. In both segments, Nine uses a repeated image which is contrasted with another repeated image.

Aurora's father has just died. She decides to create a superwoman. The minutes start with a shot of lightning, bringing to mind discovery. Then the first of the leitmotif of images of a figure in a machine, which leads to other figures more like robots or close-ups of heads with electrodes. All this suggests the creation of a bionic person. The leitmotif is broken up with shots of young women smiling and marching, or being carried triumphantly by men. More lightning. More robots. Young women dancing and doing exercises. These certainly are the superwomen of the future, as Aurora sees them. Then we switch to scenes of men with heads bowed being herded someplace. A serpent flashes on the screen. The men are seen again. A piston, a suggestive image, followed by an anatomical drawing of female sex organs. The men are entering a freight elevator. This segment ends with a scientist looking at sperm through a microscope. We are seeing the moment of conception which starts a series of remarkable events.



The most emotionally tense segment of the film is when Hildegart is starting to be independent of her mother. Aurora becomes increasingly menacing. This part starts with pictures of a caterpillar, which eventually becomes a butterfly. At 65 minutes, we see butterfly specimens under glass. Aurora is determined to keep Hildegart at any cost. In minute 64 we see Isadora Duncan dancing. It is not necessary to know it is Isadora, the great iconoclast of modern dance, to appreciate the freedom and joy of her dance. Aurora is afraid that Hildegart will get a taste for freedom. In minutes 65 and 66 we see pictures of suitcases and people going up and down stairs. Hildegart is trying to go to London to work with HG Wells. The following minutes are particularly dense with images. The tension is really building. The leitmotif of this section is a classical ballet dancer and birds flying. Since the dancer recurs 11 times, we have time to identify her as Odette, the Swan Queen in Swan Lake. She is going to die. Odette's image alternates with a potter, a woodpecker, a caged bird, a caged woman, birds flying, a hand on a gun, more birds, a mother and child, birds, a woman sleeping restlessly, an animation of Aurora putting the gun to her own head, a woman in a bird cage, a hand freeing a bird, perhaps a moment of hesitation from Aurora, a gun being loaded, another animation of Aurora holding the gun, clocks, restless sleeper, Aurora with a gun, a pendulum superimposed on the sleeper, ballet dancer, birds flying, someone going up stairs, different doors opening, a flower blooming, flying birds, the dancer, the gun, flying birds, a gun, dancer, flying birds, a gun, the dancer collapses dead, finally a bleeding woman who has been shot in the head. Hildegart is dead, shot twice in the head, once in the heart and the cheek.

Returning to the theme of how our experience is formed, the repeated use of images such as the dancer and the birds flying allow us time to form stories in our minds. Naturally, the soundtrack at minutes 66 and 67, in which we hear the voices of Hildegart and Aurora arguing, turns our mind to see the conflict. When we see the dancer, are we seeing Aurora's desire to be the choreographer of her daughter's life? Alternatively, are we seeing Hildegart's feelings of being just a dancer in her mother's life? This is reinforced by images of birds and women in cages. The birds can also be seen as expressing Aurora's fear or Hildegart's desire. Then the images become more menacing with the introduction of the guns. We do not hear the gunshots, but we are told this. We see the bleeding woman who had been shot. Nine's artfulness in selecting and sequencing images creates emotional tension.

The images in the other parts of the movie are as well-chosen and arranged, but information about Aurora's background, subsequent trial and death in an insane asylum are less emotionally engaging. I left the movie feeling as if I knew Aurora, although I saw very few images of her and none from her life. I didn't like Aurora. Not only that, but I didn't feel sorry for her. I was angry

at Aurora for destroying Hildegart's childhood. My strong reactions to **A virxe roxa** are a tribute to Nine's ability to create a reality using the expressive value of images.



By Zinnia Maravell